

800 F STREET, NW (Square 406)

Design Concepts
800 Block F Street, NW

October 7, 1999

Abstract

The Commission, in its review role described in the Memorandum of Agreement among the General Services Administration, the National Park Service, and the National Capital Planning Commission as the successor agencies to the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation, is reviewing the design concepts for the private development to occur in and behind the historic buildings in the 800 Block of F Street, NW. The Pennsylvania Avenue Development Plan and the Guidelines for Square 406, which call for the preservation of the historic buildings, govern the properties. The developer will rehabilitate the historic buildings and construct new office space behind them in accordance with the Square Guidelines, which were reviewed by the Commission at its January 1999 meeting. When the General Services Administration sold the properties to a private developer earlier this year, the properties were further protected by a Memorandum of Agreement, pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and by a Deed of Preservation Easement. Both the interior and exterior of the historic buildings are subject to review in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The review of the application of the Secretary's Standards rests with the Commission and the D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer. As the property is held in private hands, it is also subject to the normal regulatory review of the District of Columbia government. The sales contract between the General Services Administration and the developer calls for three stages of review before the Commission. The current review is the first stage.

Authority

Public Law 104-134, and Section IV of the Memorandum of Agreement among the General Services Administration, the National Park Service, and the National Capital Planning Commission.

Commission Action

The Commission:

- **Approves** the concept design for rehabilitation of historic structures in the 800 Block of F Street, NW and for new construction behind the historic structures in Square 406 as shown on NCPC Map File No. 21.10(08.21)-40707.
- **Commends** the applicant's design concepts for the development of the new building in this significant historic setting, as well as the close coordination with Commission staff, and looks forward to the development of the preliminary site and building plans.

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BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL

A private developer has submitted concept designs for rehabilitation of five historic buildings in the 800 block of F Street, NW. The proposal also includes selective demolition, especially of the rear wing of the Warder/Atlas Building and a small wing of the LeDroit Building. New construction will occur behind the historic structures, as well as on a portion of the 8th Street frontage to the south of the LeDroit Building. The developer's property covers the northernmost third of the square.

Site

The south side of the 800 block of F Street, NW, bounded by 8th, 9th, E, and F Streets, NW, is immediately across F Street from the National Portrait Gallery (Old Patent Office) and across 8th Street from the General Post Office (Tariff Commission Building). The former Riggs Bank building (now a Marriott Courtyard Hotel) and the Masonic Temple sit to the west across 9th Street. These are all significant historic institutional and commercial buildings adding greatly to the architectural and historic character of the Old Downtown. The site also is adjacent to 8th Street, NW, a major cross-axis of the L'Enfant Plan with a long-noted and protected reciprocal vista between the Old Patent Office and the National Archives.

The southern two-thirds of the square is owned by another private owner and is currently used for surface parking.

The 800 Block of F Street, NW, is individually listed in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Places and in the National Register of Historic Places. The buildings are also included in the Downtown Historic District and the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site. They represent the era--the decades following the Civil War--of richly flamboyant commercial architecture. Most buildings from this period in downtown Washington have been demolished; our understanding of this era in Washington's history is enriched by the preservation of these

buildings. Their proximity to significant federal government buildings illustrates the mixed uses and scales of buildings in nineteenth-century Washington. The Pennsylvania Avenue Development Plan (PADC Plan) and the square guidelines have always called for the historic preservation of these buildings as a high priority. The five historic buildings are, from east to west:

- The LeDroit Building, built in 1875 by A.L. Barber and Company, also the developers of the LeDroit Park neighborhood. Designed by noted architect James McGill, whose offices were located in the building until 1882, it is the premier extant example in Washington of the commercial office building in the period that pre-dated the use of elevators. Italianate in style, the brick building is enlivened by a notable amount of both wood and cast iron trim. Its prominent arched windows, large even by the standards of the day, allow public views of the interior. The storefronts have been altered many times over the years, although historic photographs as well as extant building fabric should for a near replication of the original or early storefront.
- 812 F Street, a three-story row building with a brick façade. Also dating to 1875, it has bracketed window hoods and an ornate cornice, also hallmarks of the Italianate style.
- The Adams Building, at 814-816 F Street, built three years later in 1878 by J. Bradley Adams for his own commercial and residential use. Only two stories in height and also Italianate in style, the building was probably designed by James McGill, as well.
- 818 F Street, built in 1881 by J. Bradley Adams. The three-story building has a cast-iron façade and bracketed cornice, notable because there are so few remaining downtown. The façade has been covered in intervening years, so it is not readily apparent at present.
- The Warder Building, at 527 9th Street (later called the Atlas Building), the last of the row to be built, in 1892. Designed by architect Nicholas T. Haller, who had his office in the building, it was built by B.H. Warder, a farm-implement manufacturer from Ohio who moved to Washington to speculate in land development. The six-story building is Romanesque Revival in style. Although now painted, which obscures the details of the facade, the building has a pressed red brick facade and the arcaded base and prominent horizontal lines typical of its style. The building has always served as an office building, and contains a cage elevator.

Building Program

The proposal includes:

- The rehabilitation of the five historic structures according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (attached to this report). Building facades will be restored to original condition, replicating windows and other elements where needed, based on documentary evidence. The windows in the Warder/Atlas Building will be replaced in consideration of its new residential use. Storefronts will be replicated to the extent possible based on historic photographs and remaining historic building fabric.

- Selective demolition of non-original portions of the buildings as allowed by the PADC Plan and the Square 406 Guidelines, including:
 - The lavatory wing at the rear of the LeDroit Building.
 - The narrow rear wing of the Warder/Atlas Building along the southern property line.
- New four- to eight-story construction to fill in the remainder of the site, which is currently vacant. No new construction will occur above the historic buildings, except above the rear eight feet of 814 F Street, NW, where the Square Guidelines allow construction beyond a 40-foot setback line. (The 8-foot segment of the building will be retained below.) There is also a 40-foot setback above the 40 feet height line on 8th Street. The new construction will not exceed the height of the General Post Office (Tariff Commission Building) across 8th Street. Beyond the setback zones, the height of the proposed new construction does not exceed the allowable 90 feet height.
- The loading dock will serve the new construction from 8th Street. The residential entrance to the Warder/Atlas Building will be from 9th Street. Storefront and primary doors will be used for access to retail space in the historic buildings.
- As currently proposed, the first two floors of all the structures will have commercial use. The remainder of the Warder/Atlas Building will have four floors of residential use. The LeDroit Building's final use is undetermined, but will not be residential. The new construction will have commercial and office use. The estimated building uses are 47,233 SF retail and arts, 61,421 SF office, and 20,000 SF residential.
- The site has an approximate area of 24,601 square feet (SF); the proposed project will result in lot coverage of an estimated 99%.
- At present, it is estimated that 60,527 SF of historic fabric will remain, with the addition of 68,127 SF in new construction, for a total of 128,654 SF.

Building Design

- The new building will have a trapezoidal shape derived, in part, from the placement of the historic buildings in the block.
- At this early date in the design development of the new facades, the vocabulary consists of:
 - Masonry walls with punched openings and banding derived from the Warder/Atlas Building.
 - Metal and glass curtain walls. The rhythm of the elements in the curtain wall, to the extent they are developed to date, are derived from the Italianate-style fenestration of the LeDroit Building.

- A metal frame trellis on the roof of the new structure that is intended to engage the mechanical penthouse in the overall massing, mitigate the stepped appearance of the setbacks, and relate the 90-foot building height with the higher height and mass of the future new building that will be built on the southern portion of the square.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

At its January 1999 meeting, the Commission approved the modification of the PADC Plan and the Square 406 Guidelines to allow further development potential beyond an established setback on the 8th Street property line. A setback of 40 feet was also established for new construction behind the three small buildings. Intermediate setbacks were eliminated so that the façade on F Street beyond the 40-foot setback could rise to 90 feet.

RESPONSE TO COMMISSION ACTION

The proposed project meets the conditions of the Plan and Guidelines.

EVALUATION

Staff recommends approval of the concept design. At this early stage, the design for the new building illustrates conformance with the setbacks and height limits contained in the PADC Plan, as amended, and the suggested form and materials of the new building. A rooftop embellishment, exempt from the 90-foot height limit, is proposed in order to engage the mechanical units, as well as to create a more graceful transition to the taller building that will be built behind it in the future. The staff believes this is a design goal worth pursuing, since the buildings will be seen from relatively long distances. Staff concurs in the proposed use of both masonry and glass for the new facades in the locations proposed, and anticipates the development of this element at the next phase of design review.

The buildings in the 800 Block of F Street will always be highly visible because of the width and offset of F Street as well as the public views obtained from the raised steps of the National Portrait Gallery. It is important that the new building establish its own architectural character, particularly in light of the strong character of the historic buildings in the row. It is equally important, however, that the new building complement the historic buildings, given the importance of the historic buildings and the wide view shed for this site.

As plans progress, the design team will need to ensure that the new building neither overplay nor underplay its prominent role in this prominent block.

The staff recommends that the appropriate height of the trellis be verified through sightline studies. It may be that a slightly lowered trellis height will better complement the scale and proportions of the development and still ensure the successful engagement of the mechanical penthouse. Further, the staff recommends that a robust profile for the metal mullions proposed for the glass curtain wall be used.

The plans for the historic buildings are further along, and the staff appreciates the close consultation with the developer's team and the staff of the DC SHPO. Many decisions have been made about the retention or loss of interior partitions, elements, and fabric, and many more decisions will need to be made before the Commission reviews the final plans. Investigative demolition to determine the condition of structural members has begun. Recently, the developer's team discovered fabric from original or early storefronts on the LeDroit Building, an exciting find. A structural engineer is assessing the condition of the rear wall of the LeDroit Building.

Staff is confident that the eventual rehabilitation and new construction will meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and, more importantly, that the proposal will ensure the retention of the architectural character and use of this significant landmark block. The buildings have been in physical decline (and some have served somewhat unsavory uses or been covered with later alterations) for so long that many pedestrians either can't see their architectural significance or have avoided looking for it. Within a few years, Washingtonians and visitors alike will be able to enjoy these engagingly exuberant commercial buildings that illustrate a significant era in the development of the city.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on September 15, 1999, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project had been coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the Fire Department; the Department of Public Works; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

Square 406 is bordered by F, 7th, and 8th Streets, which are designated Special Streets in the Preservation and Historic Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan. The square is also located adjacent to a designated Special Place in this element and historic buildings are located on the property. The proposed design concepts for the development of this property, including the renovation of the historic buildings, are consistent with the applicable policies in the element, which provide for the protection and enhancement of Special Streets and Places and the preservation of historic properties.

National Environmental Policy Act

GSA has determined that the project qualifies as a categorical exclusion under its National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance procedures at GSA Order PBS 1095.4C and the GSA NEPA Compliance Guide.

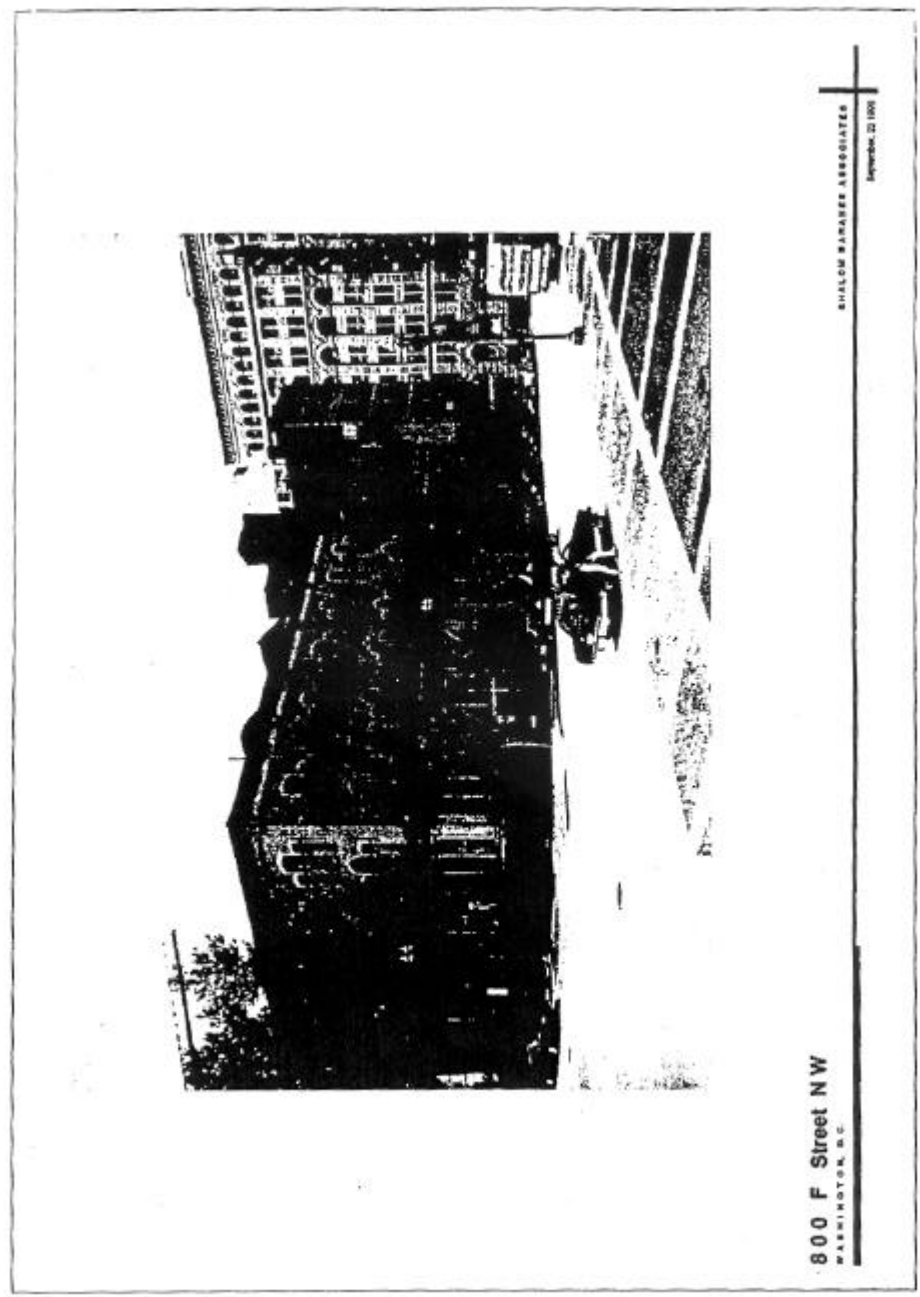
National Historic Preservation Act

GSA concluded its responsibilities under Section 106 by selling the historic properties to a private developer with a Deed of Preservation Easement, as well as by negotiating a Memorandum of Agreement stipulating that the property would be rehabilitated according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.

The review of the project's conformance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation rests with the Commission and the DC SHPO. Staffs from both agencies have been meeting regularly with the developer's team and anticipate ongoing consultation throughout the development of the project.

Archaeological investigation has been a component of the Section 106 review. Phase II Archaeological Testing of the vacant portion of the site was undertaken and resulted in the discovery of archeological resources. The research team excavated two trenches and three test units and recovered 2,000 artifacts from the 3113-square-foot project area. The deposits were primarily derived from the occupations of the lots by tenants from the 1820s to the 1910s. Based on the written records, the tenants included artisans, government bureaucrats, and service sector workers.

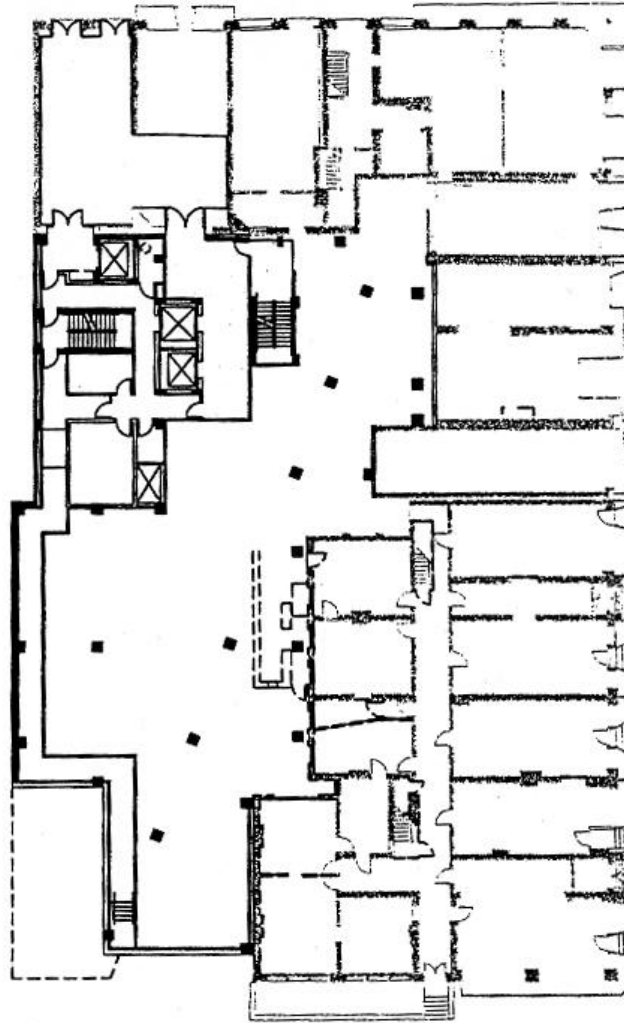
The consultant archaeologists have recommended that the site is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. As a result of that determination, GSA, the responsible federal agency, will continue the research to Phase III (analysis of artifacts).



800 F Street NW
WASHINGTON, DC

SHILOH MANAGER ASSOCIATES

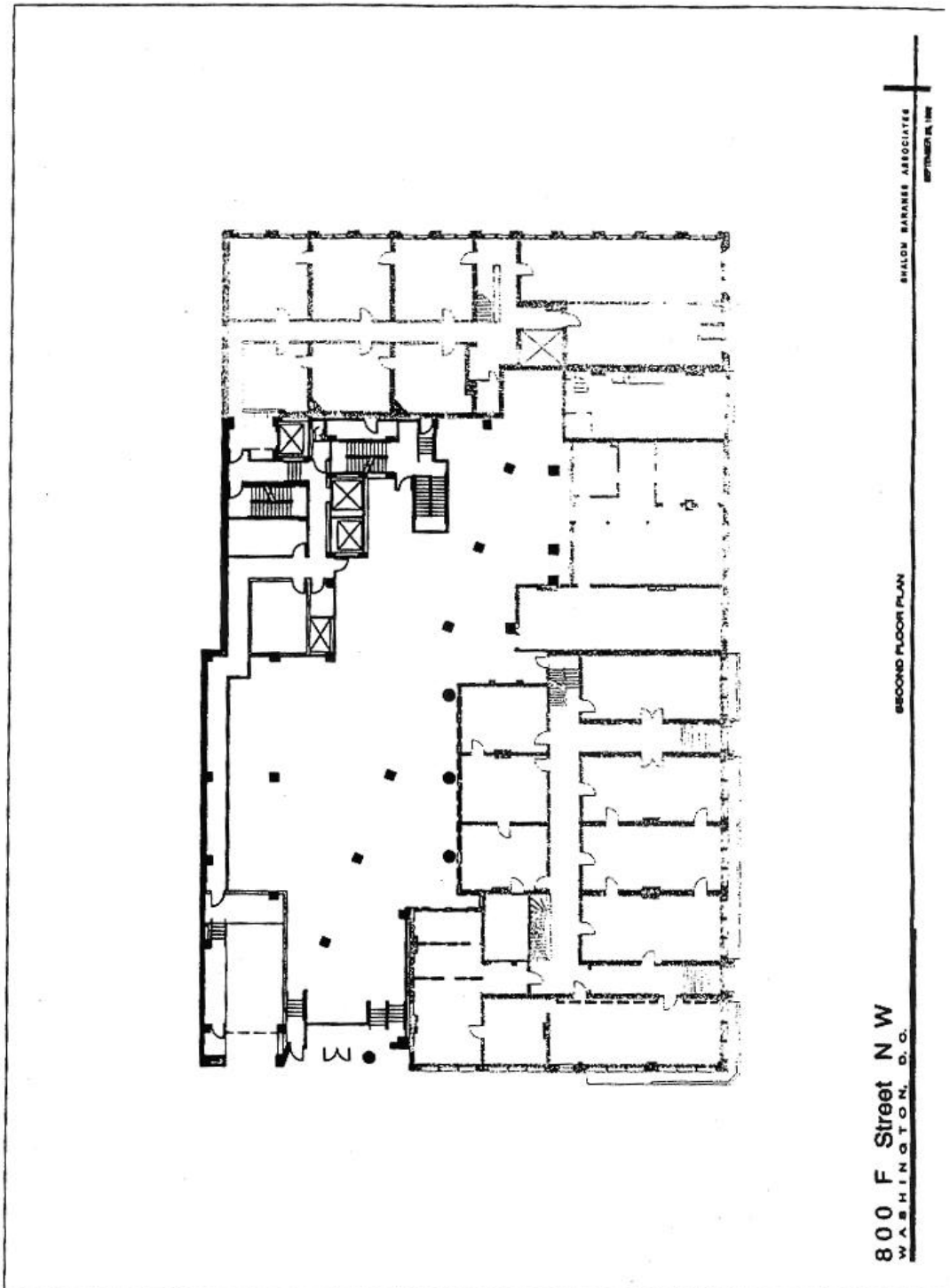
September 22, 1995

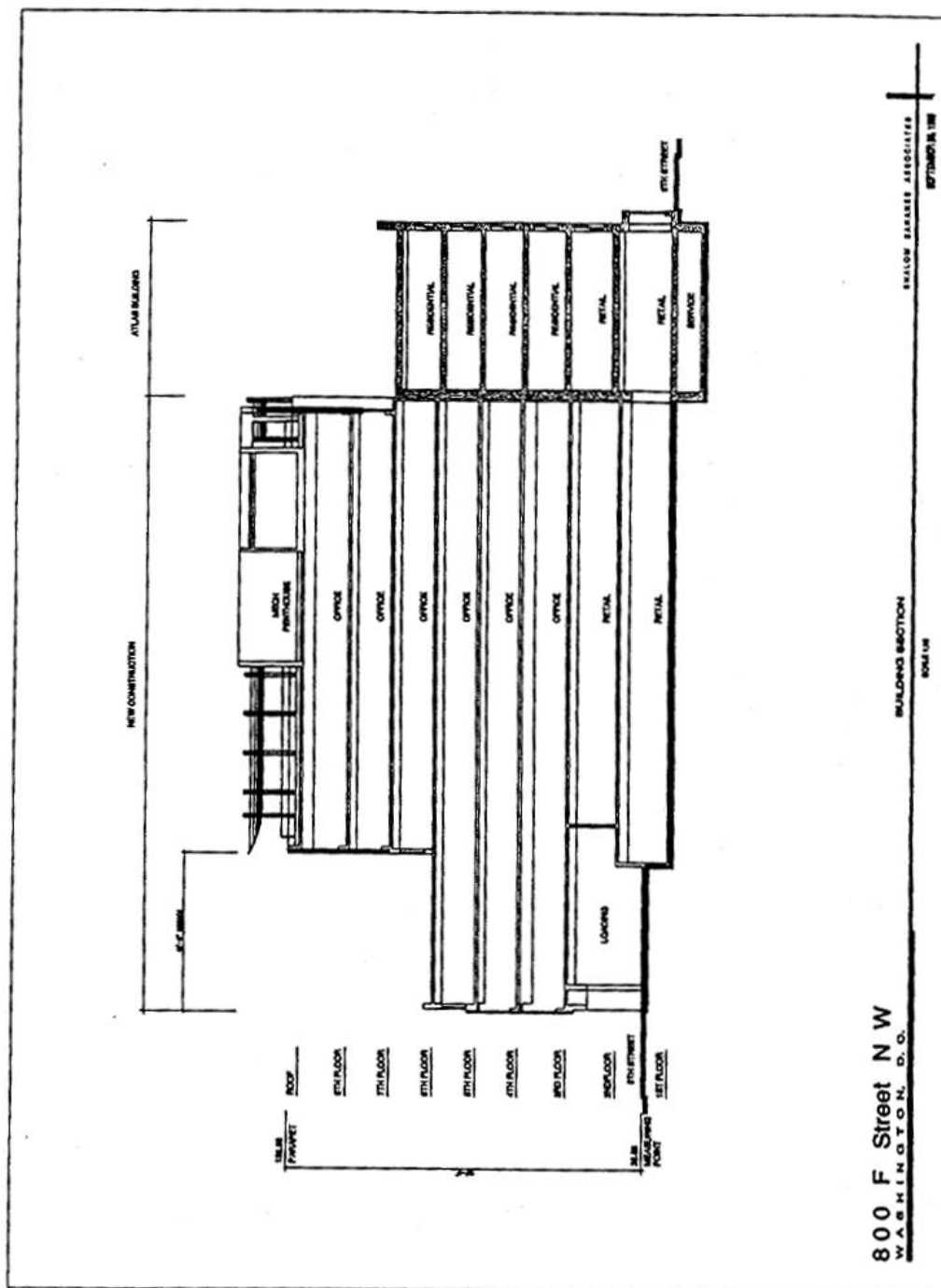


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FIRST FLOOR PLAN

SHALOM BARABES ASSOCIATES
ARCHITECTS, INC.



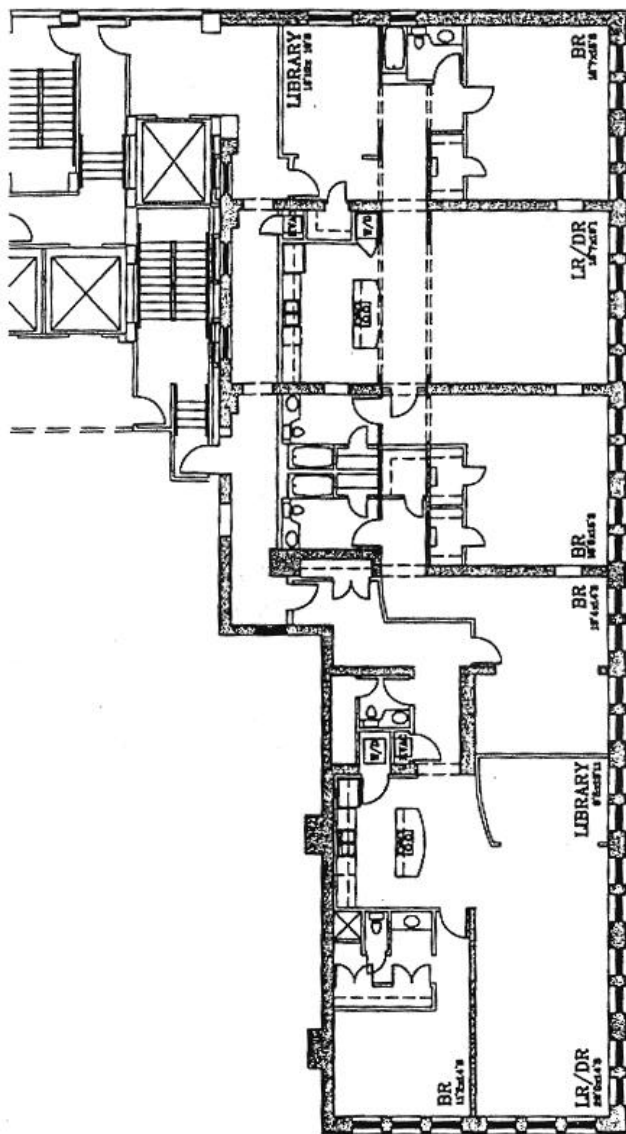


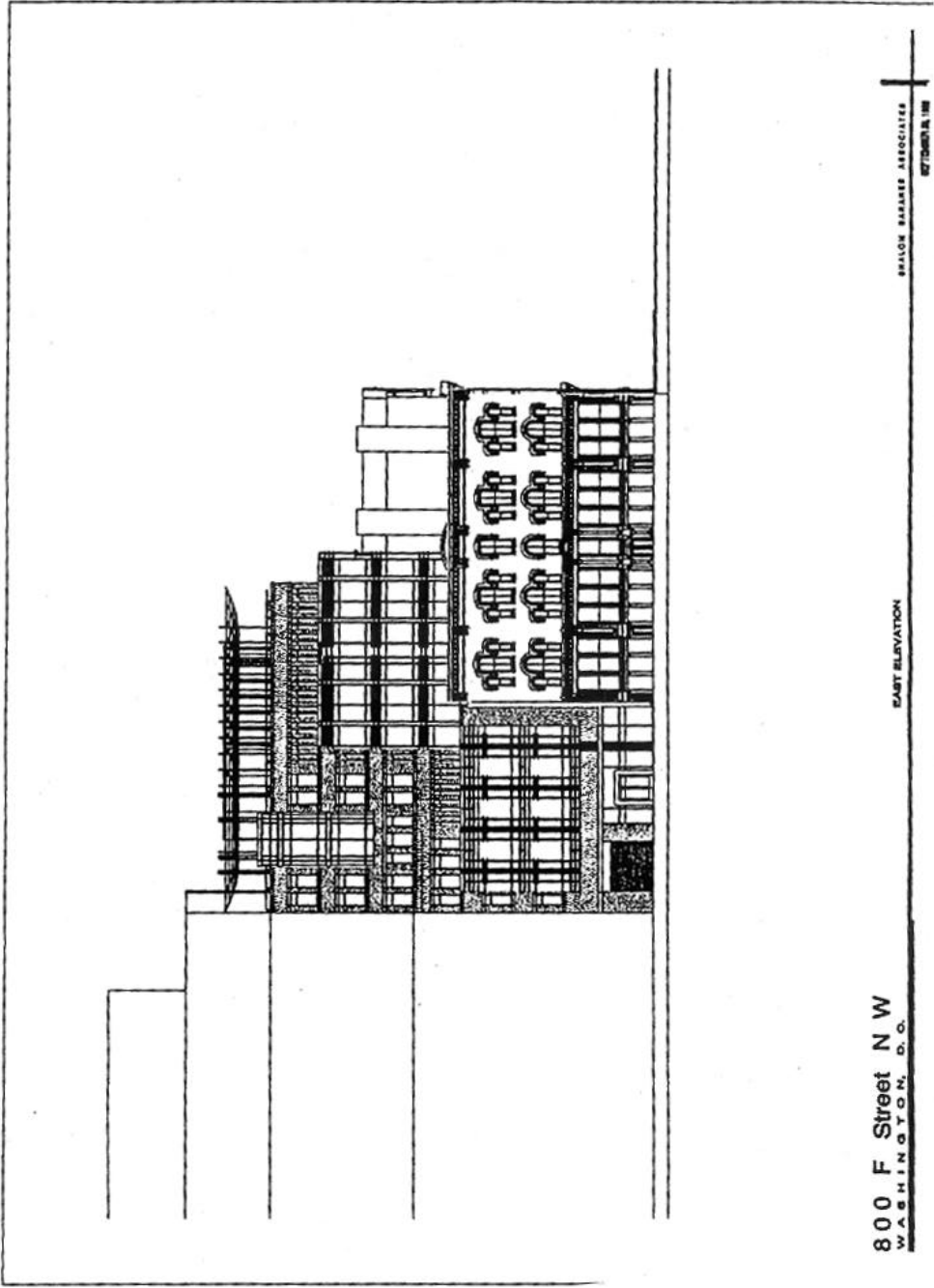
THREE UNIT APARTMENT PLAN - ATLAS BUILDING

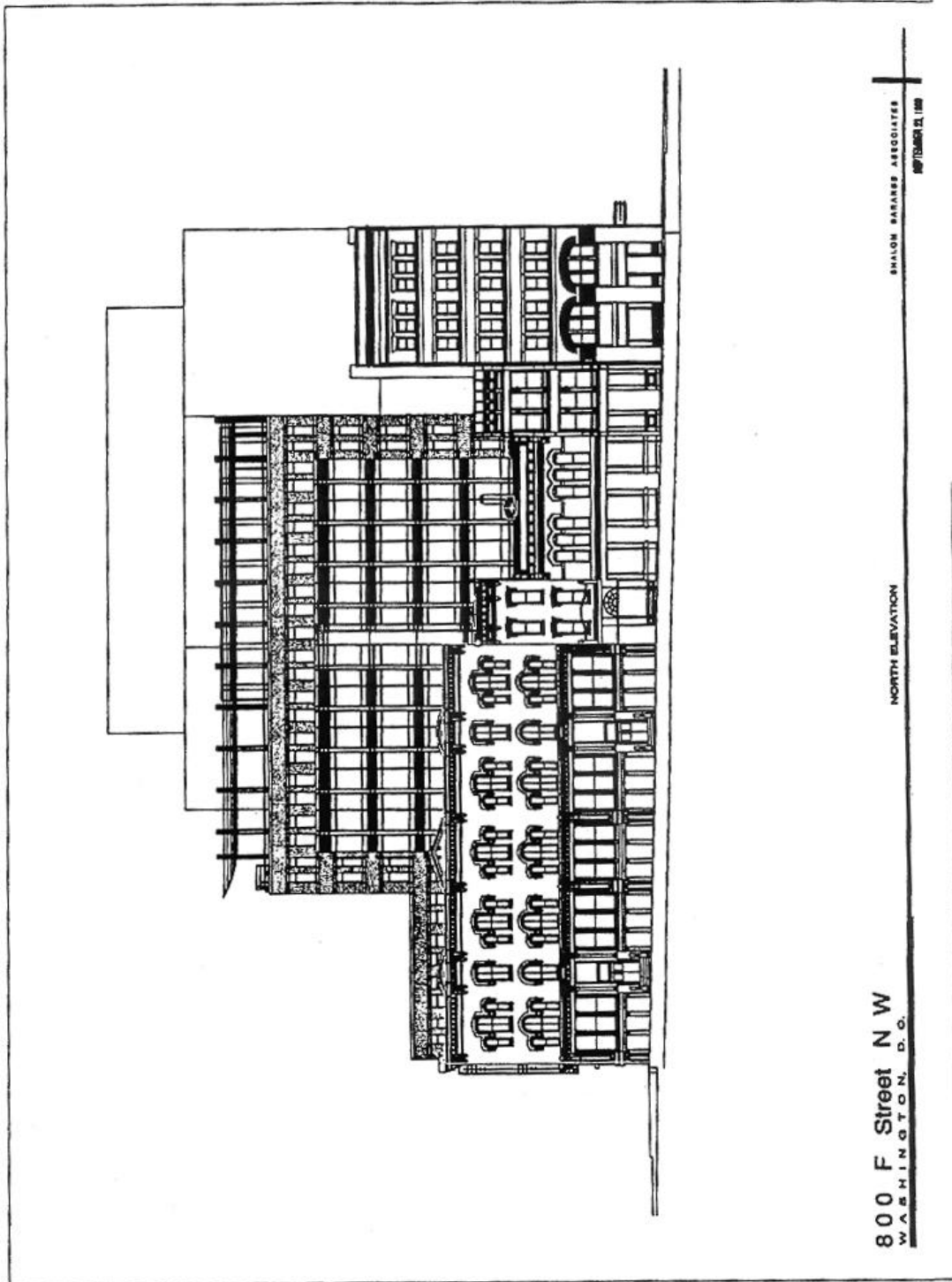
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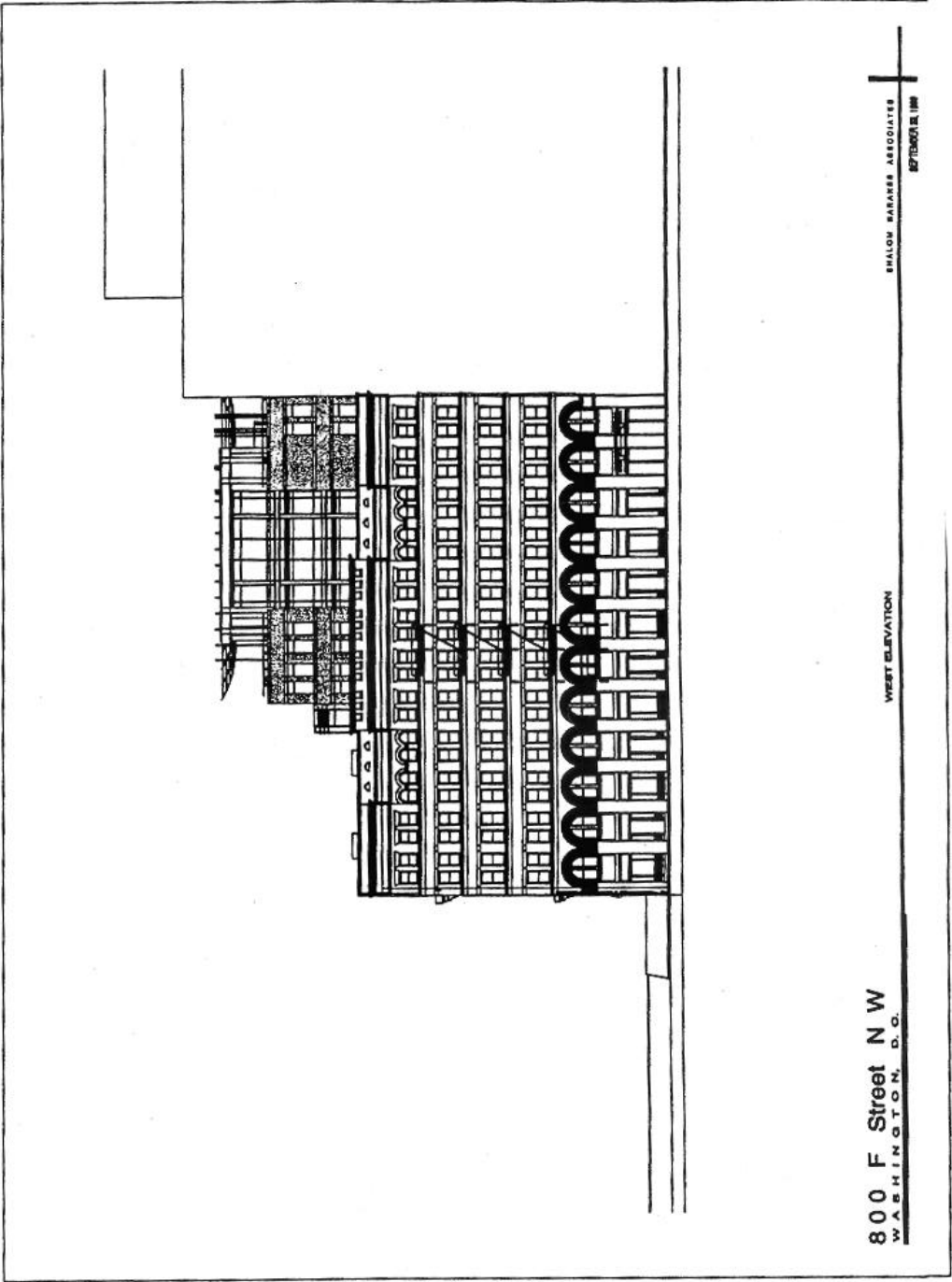
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RESEARCH IN PROGRESS









800 F Street N.W.
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WEST ELEVATION

SHALOM KARANES ASSOCIATES
SEPTEMBER 1989

